

\$250,000 USDA 'Value Added Producer' Grant awarded to Goat Milk Stuff

Written by Marty Randall

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Owners-operators Jim and P.J. Jonas and their eight children were pretty happy people on Friday morning, October 23, when their family business, Goat Milk Stuff, officially became the recipient of a \$250,000 Value- Added Producer Grant (VAPG).

The impressive grant was awarded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development division. It's all a part of the USDA's efforts to strengthen the rural economy.

Phillip Lehmkuhler, USDA Rural Development State Director, was also on hand for the brief ceremony in which the grant was presented as was Scottsburg Mayor Bill Graham and Scott County Economic Development Executive Director Robert Peacock.

“Today, we see an increase in value-added products in the marketplace that are derived from raw agricultural commodities,” commented Lehmkuhler. “These projects will help support the continued development of innovative products that are not only helping find alternative energy sources but also bringing higher value for agriculture commodities.”

When the Jonases moved to Scott County from the Charlestown area in 2009, they only hoped that their dairy-based soaps, detergents and other products would be accepted regionally. Now, they operate an international company, selling locally at their shop at 76 Lake Road North in Scottsburg and managing a burgeoning on-line business. Jim serves as the firm's COO while P.J. is CEO. The entire family works in the business, from milking their alpine dairy goats and cleaning stalls to preparing their products for shipment.

Their bright red building is a popular stop for area customers, and their tours of the facility are not only fascinating but also educational.

Last year, Goat Milk Stuff expanded to another building so that the family could experiment with a variety of recipes. The end goal was to add goat cheeses and caramels to their product line.

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The USDA RD grant will be used by them to manufacture and market their mouth-melting caramels to their customer base of 54,000 people and at the local store. Yummy!

Mayor Graham commented, “We are very proud to have Goat Milk Stuff in our community and for the Jonases to share with the world what they have and demonstrate what a Value-Added Producer Grant can do. They've gone from making soaps to making cheese and candies, which adds a lot of value to what you can derive from goats.” Mayor Graham added, “It's also amazing how they involve their children in the business. The kids are as much interested and invested entrepreneurs as their parents!”

Value-Added Producer Grants may be used for feasibility studies or business plans, working capital for marketing value-added agricultural products and for farm-based renewable energy projects.

Eligible applicants include independent producers, farmer and rancher cooperatives, agricultural producer groups and majority-controlled producer-based business ventures.

Value-added products are created when a producer increases the consumer value of an agricultural commodity in the production or processing stage.